DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 512 CS 505 206

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TITLE A Delightful Couple: Writing and Speaking Together.
PUB DATE Feb 86
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Tucson, AZ, February 15-19, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Expository Writing; Higher Education; *Integrated Activities; Persuasive Discourse; *Rhetoric; Rhetorical Criticism; *Speech Communication; Verbal Communication; *Writing (Composition); Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Speaking Writing Relationship

ABSTRACT

The rhetoric program at the University of Iowa is an integrated skills program based on four assumptions: (1) writing and speaking are modes of communication, (2) writing and speaking are equally important, (3) writing and speaking can be taught together, and (4) the administration, relevant faculty, and teachers must believe that writing and speaking can best be taught in an integrated format. If a university decides to implement an integrated skills program, problems may arise in the areas of logistics, staffing, politics, and pedagogy. However, these problems can be solved. Although no research yet exists proving that students in integrated courses develop better skills than students in composition courses, studies have shown that teachers who have been involved with integrated courses prefer the integrated concept. Finally, learning speaking and writing skills together helps students overcome weaknesses inherent in single skill instruction. (DF)

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A Delightful Couple: Writing and Speaking Together

A Speech Presented to the Western Speech Association at the February, 1986 WSA Convention, Tucson, Arizona

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Imagine, for a moment, two scenerios. The office phone rings and Professor X from school Y calls and asks, "Is it true that you folks at Iowa integrate writing and speaking?"

"Yes we do," I reply.

"Well", Professor X says," we plan on integrating our two programs next fall. Would you send along all of your materials for our planning committee?"

"Sure," I reply. "Has your committee looked into the problems yet," I asked.

"Indeed we have," he says. "But it all comes down to a matter of money. We're pretty sure we can do it!"

I shudder a bit, secure Professor X's mailing address, and close the conversation with the usual pleasantries.

Consider another scene. Again, the phone rings only this time it is the Dean of one's own college. Predictably, the conversation is different.

The Dean says, ("As you probably know by now the Excecutive Committee of the college is seriously considering splitting your integrated course into separate courses in writing and speech. I am calling to tell you to be present for a priliminary meeting next Monday afternoon at 3:30 in my office. Please bring whatever materials you think appropriate,")

And that is the end of the phone conversation.

I offer these scenerios to you both in a spirit of humor and as paradigms.--characturized paradigms to be sure--of numerous telephone conversations I have experienced.

However, my purpose this afternoon is not to entertain you. Rather, I set as my purpose to describe the necessary assumptions

one must make before making bedfellows of the basic writing and speaking courses. In addition, I hope to describe for you the inevitable logistical, political, and pedagogical problems that accompany such an arrangement. Finally, I propose to describe for you what I see as the positive results that a combined course yields.

I realize that many of you in the audience are familiar with the Rhetoric Program at Iowa. For those of you that are not, I will sketch it only briefly since more established published accounts are available.[1]

The Rhetoric Program is an integrated communication skills program. We are a separate academic unit within the College of Liberal Arts. The course is required of all entering Freshmen and all tranfer students who have not met the requirement elsewhere. Our department has twelve faculty members, some of whom have part-time appointments in other academic departments. Our department has 140 teaching assistants; our department offers instruction to approximately 6000 students per year. Teaching assistants are drawn from 18 different academic programs, divisions, and departments. That, in outline form, will give you some notion of the size of our integrated program.

Let's turn next to the assumptions that I believe are absolutely necesary before an integrated program is created or retained.

First, one must assume that writing and speaking are modes of communication. I stress this assumption because it is not self-evident and because many teachers either of speech or of composition have different beliefs about the nature of writing and

about the nature of public speaking. To claim that writing and speech are modes of communication implies that, whether writing or speaking, the commication must be intelligible to an audience, adapted to an audience, fulfilling some sort of audience expectations, working within some interactive dimensions, et cetera. Viewing writing and speech, as modes of communication has, as a philosophical basis, the assumption that communication, regardless of mode, is audience- centered and audience-directed.

A second assumption that I believe is necessary before an integrated program can happen is that one must believe that writing and speaking are <u>equally</u> important. If one skill is viewed as more important, then serious imbalances begin to occur not only in the curriculum but in hiring patterns and even more seriously in course content.

I believe it is a necessary assumption that all those connected with an integrated skills program believe that writing and speech can be taught together.[2] Again, not all faculty believe that the two skills are compatible. Those who profess to teach writing are reluctant if not downright hostile, sometimes, at the intrusion which a round of speeches makes on the course. Similarly, although to a much lesser extent, mainline speech teachers tend to have little time for such notions as "discovery of self" in writing, I stress the fact that those who wish to integrate writing and speech must accept the assumption that the two can be taught together and taught successfully for yet another reason. It has been my observation that composition teachers tend to emerge from departments that emphasize literary studies and literary methods. Speech teachers tend to emerge from departments that emphasize such

concepts as argumentation and persuasion. Such individuals with such backgrounds more often than not do not accept the assumption that writing and speech can be taught together except at some theoretical level but, when a practical classroom effort is made one or the other of the skills can be slighted, if not omitted.

Most of all, I believe that an administration, the relevant faculty, and the teachers must be committed to the belief that writing and speaking can best be taught in an integrated format. If, for example, those responsible for an integrated course or for integrating a course, are pushed to it for reasons of economic savings, or, worse yet, administrative ease, any kind of integrated skills approach is doomed from the outset. Similarly, if a faculty is pushed into an integration so that a weak department or a set of weak course offerings are strengthened by joining it to a perceived stronger one, such an enterprise is doomed.

What then, are the inevitable problems that can result after all of the concerned parties hold to the beliefs that writing and speech are modes of communication, that they are equally important skills, that they can be taught together, and that they are committed to doing so? Certain problems will arise.

Among the logistical problems is that of turf. The usual pattern is to teach speech in a Speech Communication department and to teach composition in an English department. When one integrates compostion and speech the problem arises about where to place such an instructional unit in a college. If one pulls away the "bread and butter courses" from the departments serious questions of decreased FTE, budget lines, and faculty appointments arise. If the new program is given a separate piece of turf in the academic garden, a

new administrative unit and support staff are necessary as are equipment purchases, promotion policies, et cetera.

Going hand-in-hand with the turf problem is what I will call the staffing problem. Obviously, one wants to hire one's own faculty. If, however, one hires a full-time, faculty member for an integrated skills program, that person can expect to encounter serious identity problems. More likely than not, given the way most research universities are organized, a faculty member who devotes full-time to an integrated skills program will probably not receive the institutional recognition and rewards that full-time faculty members in ordinary academic departments receive.

Why not hire split appointees? Doing so invites risks, not insurmountable, but definite risks. Attending two sets of faculty meetings, two sets of departmental committee meetings, and meeting the tenure requirements in two different academic units present unusual time constraints. I would only mention the question of which department receives or is likely to receive the split appointee's commitment and energy.

Given economic constraints it is unlikely that an integrated program can be staffed entirely with full-time faculty. Consequently, an integrated skills department must rely on teaching assistants drawn from various backgrounds, pursuing various degrees and careers. As a consequence, the faculty in an integrated skills program inevitably encounter the problem of how best to appoach staff training in its various guises and disguises. The fact remains, however, that a great deal of time, energy, and resources must be allocated to the development, training and supervision of that teaching staff.

Political problems also arise. Is such a conjoined skills unit a service course and only a service course? Or, is the instruction that is going on of some academic value and merit? If an administration views an integrated skills program as central to the educational mission of a college then, of necessity, financial support must be diverted from other academic departments, causing increased ill-will. With careful planning, wise administration, and understanding colleagues these political problems can be surmounted and overcome--but not easily.

Certain pedagogical problems also arise. While some may seem petty, I assure you they are not. Among the pedagogical problems that I would enumerate is, first of all, the question of whether to have a single textbook or several texts. If only one, which one and how best to make everyone use it? If several texts, how can there be much unity across the sections of such a course?

Should one have a uniform syllabus and departmental-wide testing so that students receive approximately the same quantity and quality of instruction regardless of section? Or should an integrated skills program give their teachers considerable latitude and much individual responsibility?

Should one go to the old modal patterns of description, narration, argument, and persuasion? Or, should one adopt some of the newer patterns of expressive writing, and interpersonal communication?

More than likely, the largest pedagogical problem to confront in an intergrated skills course is how much time to devote to each skill. Logically, a student cannot be writing a paper and presenting a speech at the same time. Therefore, the question of which skill

gets practiced at what point in the course and for what purposes becomes a very real and tramatic issue to resolve.

I realize that by emphasizing inevitable problems that do arise in an integrated skills course I may be giving many of you in the audience the impression that the problems are insurmountable and that the issues are too difficult to overcome. If so, let me hasten to the final section of this report and indicate to you what I see as the positive results that accrue from integrating writing and speaking.

Personally, the philosophical reasons for integrating, the theoretical bases for integrating, and the administrative tidyness of an integrated program, all become totally irrelevant unless students in such a program can be shown to improve their speaking and writing skills. Do they? Yes. I need only refer you to the Trank and Steele essay entitled "Measurable Effects of a Communication Skills Course; an Intial Study," that appeared in the April, 1983 issue of Communication Education.[3] Using a nationally normed test these two scholars demonstrated, empirically, that students do develop their writing and speaking skills in an integrated course. Do students in a composition course increase, refine, extend, polish, or improve their writing skills better than those in a combined course? I don't know. No such study has been done. Do students in a separate composition course and a separate public speaking course learn more than students in an integrated skills course? Unfortunately, that empirical study remains undone as well.

A second positive result that I can document addresses the question of whether or not teachers approve of teaching such a

course after they have taught it for a time. Here, too, in a study that is presently underway in our own program[4] we have discovered that teachers new to the program initially prefer to teach the skill most closely aligned to the academic unit in which they pursuing a degree. Put another way, teachers from English initially tend to prefer teaching only a writing course; teachers from a Speech initially prefer to teach only speech. After two semesters of teaching an integrated skills course, a significant number change and endorse the integrated conception.

Educationally, I also see positive outcomes from integrating the two skills.

Doing so is efficient. Rather than having the composition teacher stress organization from 9 to 10 in English 1:01 and the speech teacher stress organization from 10 to 11 in speech 1:01, one teacher can help students learn structure or focus, or support, or any other rhetorical concept for both skills.

Learning the skills together helps a student overcome the inherent weaknesses in single skill instruction. A tightly organized essay is difficult to construct-written words lead to other written words and the overall pattern is often obscured. In a speech, however, organization, while absolutely essential, is easier to hear, follow, understand and learn because of the need for redundancy.

This factor of complimenting inherent weaknesses in the other skill emerges in other happy ways, too.

A writer, when writing, never has an audience. A speaker always does. The concept of audience, I contend is best taught in an intergrated course.

A speaker, unless trained to use an orally-styled manuscript, never has the chance to refine and revise the style of the speech. Writers do. Again, I believe the language using habits of a student speaker are best developed in an integrated course.

Integrating the skills enables students to understand, appreciate, and practice writing and speaking as communicative acts addressed to an audience. Not self-reflexivity for its own sake. Not glibbness for momentary effect. Not 500 grammatically correct and empty words on a page. Not 5-7 minutes of vocalized generalization. But rather, the communicative activity, the intellectual activity of giving substantive ideas a chance to take on meaning in another person through the artistic use of language, written and spoken.

Understood as communicative acts, writing and speaking compliment and enhance each other, enabling a student to function articulately and effectively in a symbol-using and symbol-dependent community.

An idealized goal? Indeed.

An impossible dream? Not at all. Difficult and problematic, but not impossible.

If one accepts the necessary philosophical assumptions that underpin an integrated course, resolves to confront and overcome the inevitable problems that arise from such an integration, I am convinced that positive educational results can, have, an will continue to happen. Thank you very much.

Footnotes

1. Cleo Martin, "The Rhetoric Program at The University of Iowa," Options in English: Freshman Composition (MLA, 1979), 67-73. Also, Donovan J. Ochs, "Teaching to Write and Speak: Diverging and Converging Paths," The Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 14 (Spring, 1980), 6-9. For a discussion of the philosophical reasons to combine the skills, see: Nancy L. Harper, "Integrating Instruction in Speaking and Writing in The Basic Course" Iowa Journal of Speech Communication, 2 (Fall, 1979), 16-24.
2. Jane Blankenship and Sara Lathem Stelzner, Speech Communication Activities in The Writing Classroom, Eric Clearinghouse on reading and Communication Skills, 1979.
3. Douglas M. Trank and Joe M. Steele, "Measurable Effects of a Communication Course: An Initial Study," Communication Education, 32 (April, 1983), 227-236.
4. Don Arenz, "A Review of The Rhetoric Requirement," departmental study-in-progress at The University of Iowa.